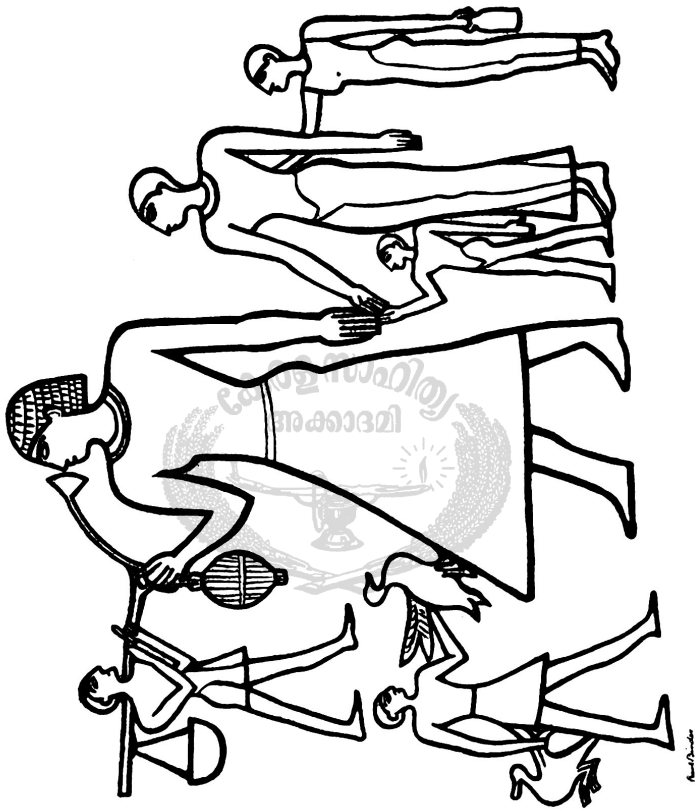




THE HOW-&-WHY SERIES NO. 15

THE EGYPTIANS





CHILDREN WAITING ON THEIR PARENTS

Amal Prasad

THE EGYPTIANS

BY

S. R. K. GLANVILLE

ILLUSTRATED BY PEARL BINDER

THE HOW-*൫*-WHY SERIES

EDITED BY

GERALD BULLETT



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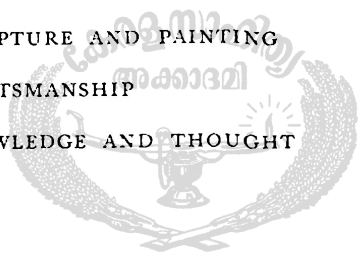
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THE EGYPTIANS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

THREE thousand years ago, when Britain was inhabited by barbarous tribes and the City of London had not been thought of, Egypt was already a civilized country, with arts and crafts and towns and public buildings. That civilization was already centuries old, and lasted for nearly a thousand years more before it was swamped by foreign invaders. During the last hundred years, from the comparatively small traces of it that still exist, we have been busy trying to discover what that civilization was. People had forgotten how to read the writing of the Egyptians; now we can understand it. Thousands of large and small objects which were part of their everyday life—their houses, their furniture, their crockery, and their jewellery—have been dug up out of the sand after having been buried there all these years. All these things, when studied together, give us a wonderfully complete picture of the life of the Egyptians three thousand years and more ago.

But, you may ask, what is the point of talking about a foreign people of three thousand years ago,

however civilized? I think there are two answers: the first is that once you begin to know something about them, you find that in a great many of the important things of life they are very like us moderns, and then you can't help being interested in them. And the second is that although they were conquered by one foreign nation after another, they have still managed to leave behind bits of themselves, and some of these bits are actually part of our own civilization. For instance, we have Egyptian words in our language, and their decoration in our houses. We try to preserve their finest buildings and other works of art as being some of the most beautiful things we have to look at in the world. Finally, because they lived so long ago they had to find out how to do all sorts of things which we now understand quite well; and often their experiments were the beginning of our knowledge.

So my aim in this book is to get you to agree with the two answers I have just given. To tell you, even in outline, all that we now know about the Ancient Egyptians would be quite impossible in a small space. But if I can show you that they were a real people like ourselves, and if I can persuade you that you really must go to the nearest big museum and see some of the things they made, you will have to admit that the Egyptians are worth studying today.

In the next three chapters I shall try to describe how they lived; first as private people in their homes, and afterwards as citizens, with bread and

butter to earn and public duties to perform. By then I hope that your appetite will be whetted and that you will want to learn what it is they left behind for us to know them by. In the last four chapters, then, you will find some account of what I consider to be their chief gifts to our time.

The Egyptians owned and governed their own land with short intervals of invasion, as a united people with written historical records, for about three thousand years, during the whole of which time they had a considerable degree of material civilization. But in speaking of them I shall have to confine myself in general to the most successful period of their history, namely the years from about 1600 to 1000 B.C. This period is known as the New Kingdom. It is marked by the widest intercourse between the different nations of the then known world, and by the tremendous wealth and power of Egypt; and it is the time that yields us the most evidence with which to reconstruct her story. I shall also refer, however, to the two other great periods of Ancient Egypt. They are, first, the Old Kingdom, about 2800 to 2300 B.C. (the time of the Great Pyramid builders); and, second, the Middle Kingdom, from about 2100 to 1700 B.C. It is in the Middle Kingdom that the Egyptians are generally considered to have produced their finest works of art.

CHAPTER II

PRIVATE LIFE

WHEN we think of the private life of our friends, we naturally picture them at home. Now I have lived for several months in a rebuilt ancient house of an Egyptian bungalow town. And in some of the neighbouring ruins it was possible to discover from the names on the door-posts who the original owners had been. Working daily in the houses and finding pieces of furniture, kitchen utensils, and all sorts of human remains, one began to feel that the old inhabitants were one's friends. At least I think I know their habits well enough to be able to take you into one of their houses and show you how they lived there.

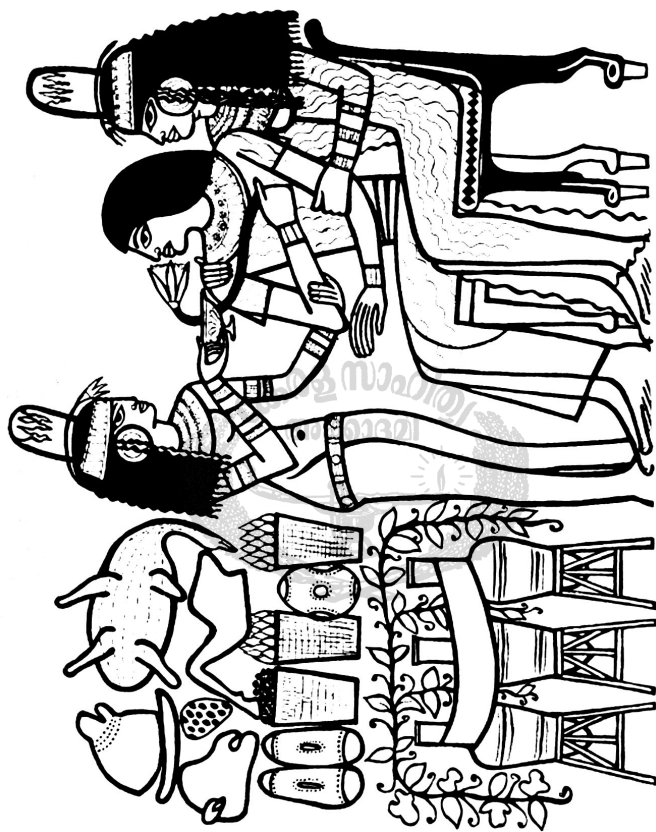
I have said that this was a bungalow town. As a rule in the big towns the houses had two or even three floors and were closely crowded together from lack of space. If we look at a map of Egypt we see that, except for a broad triangle made by the Delta, the green part of Egypt is simply a narrow strip with the Nile in the middle. On each side is the desert mountain, where there was no civilization. The green part had to provide not

only room for towns, but also fields for corn and flax and the other things on which the whole people lived. So in big towns especially, where there were large numbers living together, very little space could be given to any one house. But in the country, if a rich man could afford to buy the land, he could use as much as he liked for his house and gardens.

Our bungalow town came into being for special reasons which we need not trouble about. The king of the time, Akhenaten, built his palace there and most of his courtiers came and lived near-by. So too did a large number of less important persons and quite poor people. We had better avoid the very large houses of the great men and call at one of the pleasant little villas in a side street. It has a garden of its own, big enough to contain a few small outhouses as well as some flowerbeds. Probably the owner has an allotment on the other side of the river, where he could grow some vegetables and pasture a goat or two. Everything here is built of brick, though the bricks are not baked by fire, but simply dried by being left in the sun for a couple of days. A severe rainstorm may damage the walls, but they are easily mended. In any case rain is only to be expected once or twice a year. Wood is used very little; partly because it is scarce, partly because it is likely to be soon destroyed by ants. But the actual doors are of wood, and so are the rafters and a few shelves. Some of the bigger houses have stone for the door-posts and for the lintel which went across them; otherwise these too are of wood or even brick.

You would be surprised to find how modern the general appearance of the bungalow is. The walls are whitewashed outside like an English cottage. Inside, the mud floors may seem a little bare, in spite of whitewash and distemper. But rugs make them homely. The rooms are what we should expect at home: a hall, one or two sitting-rooms, a big dining-room, bedrooms, and bathrooms at the back of the house. The kitchen is generally a separate building some distance from the house. There are no pictures on the walls, but painted patterns of flowers, rather like wallpaper, with the bricks above and whitewash below. Although it is a bungalow, there are stairs leading off the dining-room which will take us to the roof. This is flat; a pleasant place to sit (under an awning) in the hot weather, or to sleep at night.

If the owner of the house is giving a party, we shall see what entertainment could be in Ancient Egypt. There are as many guests as his dining-room will hold. They sit on chairs or stools, and the host is careful to arrange men and women in pairs, as we should. But there is no table to sit round; everyone is waited on separately by children or servants. The food has been arranged on light stands; probably most of it is cold. We can have roast duck (but not chicken), fish, and beef; and there are plenty of vegetables we are used to; but, again, we must do without potatoes. There are no sweets, except, perhaps, cakes, but there is a splendid collection of fruits to make up for them: figs, pomegranates, dates, and grapes.



GUESTS AT A DINNER-PARTY

We shall be expected to drink light beer or wine.

So far as we know, the Egyptians had no public restaurants where they could entertain their friends. So they had to make the most of their parties at home. That is why they so often hired a small band to play to their guests during the meal. Usually the entertainment included dancing girls. It is clear that the Egyptians were very fond of these entertainments, and I imagine that they made up for the lack of theatres and concerts. The nearest approach to that kind of thing for their amusement was the festivals of their gods. These must sometimes have been very like a bank-holiday fair. Others centred round performances on the lines of our miracle-plays.

But to return to our meal. You eat without knives and forks, as you do if you dine with an Egyptian of today who has not adopted European customs. On the other hand, although you will not have a table-napkin to yourself, a maid will bring a bowl of water and a towel to wash your fingers with. There are a large number of courses and a great deal of talk. So with the music and the dancing the meal will last all the afternoon. Before you leave the house you will be able to stroll in the garden. And when you have gone your host and hostess will change from the very fine white linen dresses which they have worn for the party into much plainer clothes. They will retire to their private parlour and sit cross-legged on the floor or on low plain stools. And the children who have

only been allowed in to wait on the grown-ups will become the most important people in the house.

By this time you will be curious to know where all this food comes from and how they could afford this generous hospitality. And this is important; for how the people get their bread and butter is at the bottom of the history and development of every country. This is most true of Egypt. There can be few countries in the world better adapted by nature for supporting life. Nowhere do geography and climate more definitely control the kind of existence that the inhabitants must choose. For Egypt is the Nile. Look at the physical map of the country with its narrow green line winding between miles of brown desert on either side, with its triangular burst of green just before it reaches the sea. Yet for practical purposes the whole life of Egypt is cramped into that green strip with its V-shaped head. It is so now, and since history began it always has been. But here is the extraordinary thing: the strip—until you reach the Delta—is nothing but a river and its banks. Year after year, for hundreds upon hundreds of years, it has brought down in flood-time a cargo of fine mud from the Abyssinian mountains. All the way through its trough in the desert it has dropped part of its cargo and hurled the rest into the sea at its mouth. Gradually this mud has formed a thick deposit, completely covered when the river was in flood. But when the flood stopped, the stream cut a channel for itself through the mud, which thus formed low banks. So the mud at the mouth of the

river was piled up a little higher than the sea, until the land of Egypt extended for a hundred miles north of the ancient coast. This is half of what the Egyptian schoolboy means when he repeats the most familiar lesson of all, 'Egypt is the Nile, and the Nile is Egypt'; the river has actually made the land he lives in; for the bulk of his country—the desert—is not fit for permanent habitation.

But the process is still going on: every year more mud, more land, is coming down. And here is the rest of the meaning of that tag. You know that in this country we have to use large quantities of manure, both natural and artificial, to make our crops and vegetables grow. In Egypt manure is of secondary importance, for the annual layer of new mud provides new earth, like a field that has never been sown. Moreover, this earth is the richest in the whole world. Thus the Nile not only gives the land, but renews it every year.

Now we begin to see where the bread and butter comes in. The earliest inhabitants of Egypt appear to have lived on the top of the desert overlooking the rich valley. The vegetation was wilder than it is now: instead of cultivated fields there were papyrus swamps; and wild beasts—hippopotamus and crocodile—now found only further south, made the river dangerous. As man learnt to hunt, and gradually to drive out the animals and to control the marshes, he moved down into the valley. Eventually he made that his home. He learnt to master the river in some measure, and made it run in fixed channels. He turned papyrus thickets into fields

for his crops. He found himself master of a farmer's paradise. All his essential needs were supplied by the land, the product of the Nile, and the river itself.

From the land: corn, wheat, and barley (maize was introduced into Egypt at a much later date), flax for linen, the vine, fruit-trees and vegetables, as well as pasture for cattle. From the river: fish, papyrus for rope, writing-paper, sandals, and a dozen other purposes, and, most important of all, water. For there was almost no rain. The land gave him bricks for his houses; the river was his main highway from one end of the kingdom to the other.

All this sounds very different from our own life. Instead of the village High Street, or the main railway line, or Piccadilly or the Strand, the essential landmark for the Egyptian was (and is today) the Nile. We grow up among motor-cars, tube trains, and telephones, and cannot imagine our civilization without them; the Egyptian would have been equally lost without his simple engineering works: canals, dykes, and water-raising contrivances. If these things went wrong, it was worse for him than a general strike is for us. For even when they had got this marvellous land, they could only keep it safe with the greatest forethought and watchfulness.

A man might buy in 1933 B.C. two or three acres of land close to the river. At the height of the Nile they had been entirely flooded except for a single dyke or bank. On the top of this was a road—no more than well-trodden mud, but the only land connection between the river bank and the

desert. When the river subsided a little the fields came up out of the water and were sown. A network of small canals was made and for some time, while there was still plenty of water in the river, it was possible to supply water to every part of the land by opening a sluice on the river's bank. Later the sluices were not needed and it was necessary to raise the water from the low level of the river to that of the canals.

But if in 1932 B.C. the rains in the mountains to the south-east of Egypt were heavier than they had been the year before, it meant that the Nile would rise higher in the flood season. Then the dyke would be under water and half destroyed, together, perhaps, with a village at its end, unless proper precautions were taken. If, on the other hand, the river was exceptionally low, the fields furthestmost from the bank would receive no water; and when it subsided the canals would be too shallow to let the water in.

So every year for weeks before the flood was due—about the middle of June—people were talking of the chances of a 'good' Nile, and considering the steps they would have to take in case of emergency. For everyone in the country was affected by this annual event. Each individual was anxious for the sake of his own crops; for practically everyone grew part of his daily food. Government officials had to work out in advance what proportion of each man's crop they could take for the state, since this was the main form of tax; and wise governors of provinces made plans to feed the poor people of

the district if the Nile failed, and to store up the grain for future years if the harvest should be above the average.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the whole country was organized to meet this crisis. They had something very like our own Meteorological Office, which tries to tell us in advance what kind of weather to expect. The Egyptian equivalent aimed at telling the people what kind of Nile to expect. Because the priests were from the earliest times the most learned part of the people, they were the officials responsible for this service, and their 'instruments' were usually kept in the temple grounds. The instrument was simple enough; and, of three or four that remain, one is in use today. It is called a Nilometer, and consists of a well, square or circular, within reach of the river, so that as the water in the Nile rises and falls, that in the well keeps pace with it. Steps wind down into the well, so that it can usually be got at. Now the beginning of the Nile's flood takes place at almost exactly the same date at any given point on the Nile every year, so that the priests were ready to watch the water from the moment it started to rise. Thus day by day they noted the amount of the rise as registered by the scale. They knew what was the average rate of rise, and they kept records of the instruments from previous years. Each day they could compare the new figures with the old, and were better able to judge how the coming Nile would compare with the last. On these calculations they decided at what moment the sluices were to

be opened and the whole land allowed to come under water. Or, if the river was very big, they sent out warning to raise the dykes. The danger to life and property, if this was not attended to, was so great that the government had the power to make everyone assist at this work without payment. It was only in the last century that this practice was given up. The Ancient Egyptians regarded it as so much a natural part of their existence that they believed that Osiris, the King of the Dead, would have the right to demand the same service of them in the 'Blessed Fields' of the next world. But to avoid doing the work themselves, they had little models, called *ushabti*s, made and buried with them to do the work.

There was another result of the flood which concerned everybody. As the water lay on the fields for six weeks or so, it was apt to wash away or cover up with mud the old boundaries between one man's land and another's. To some extent this could be avoided by using little boundary stones, like our 'bench marks'; but a more certain way of marking last year's limits was accurate measurement. In this way the Egyptians early began a science of land measurement or geometry. The importance of this for our own civilization is probably not realized. Incidentally this trouble with the boundaries is by no means over and done with. In Egypt today most of the low sandy slopes which run from the flat cultivation up to the cliffs which form the edge of the real desert are preserved by the government. For here, where most of the villages stand,

the whole people built their towns and graveyards, the remains of which are being saved for excavation. But after a high Nile it often happens that a few yards more of the 'low desert', as these slopes are called, have been sufficiently inundated with the water to be worth cultivating; and the peasants, whose lands run along the edge of the cultivation and the sand, try to increase their small fields by pushing their boundaries further inland to include this newly soaked soil. It is often only a matter of a foot or two at a time. But in the course of years this mounts up. So the government's inspectors are continually on the watch for this today as they have always been.

We can tell how important a place this question of the boundaries had in the life of the Egyptians from references to it in their writings, and from the scenes of land measurement in the pictures in their tombs. But perhaps the most striking evidence of importance is in the *Book of the Dead*. This is a collection of prayers and magical spells written on papyrus. According as he could afford it, everyone had a smaller or greater selection of these sayings buried with him for his protection in the next world. One of the most important 'chapters' was one we call the 'Negative Confession', in which the dead man is made to say that he has not committed a number of sins. Among them he says, 'I have not stolen cultivated land'. In another chapter this is expanded: 'I have not stolen land from my neighbour's estate and added it to my acre. I have not encroached upon the field of others.'

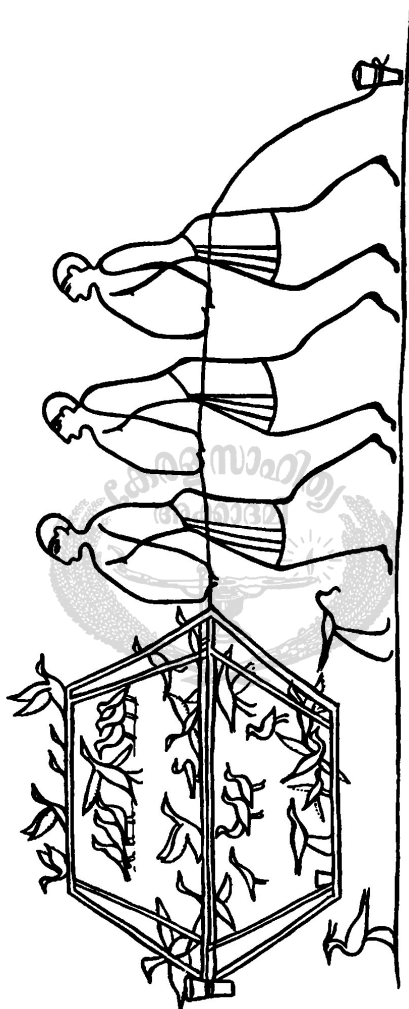
I have spent some time talking about the river and the land because it is essential to realize that that was the very basis of existence in Egypt if one is to understand what they did in other ways. It does not matter whether the main crops are corn or cotton, for home consumption as in earliest times, or for export as under the Roman Empire down to the present day. The wealth of the country is entirely in the land and the land depends on the river. That is why thousands of pounds have been spent in the last thirty years on building great dams to improve the water supply. It has always been so: over four thousand years ago an old man called Hekanekht, who lived with a large family near Luxor, went north to the neighbourhood of Cairo to see to some land he owned there. While away he wrote several letters to his eldest son, whom he had left in charge, and they were almost entirely about one subject—the care of the land and the crops: ‘If there is any flooding on our land, remember, you’re the farmer of it. (Bad luck to all my family in your care!) Be very diligent in your farming and very careful.’ And again: ‘Isn’t the Nile very low? Well, you’ll see we have got victuals in proportion to it (*i.e.* none too much to eat). But be patient, for you know I’ve been able to keep you up to date.’ Later in the same letter: ‘Give my people their food only so long as they work. Make the most of all my land; work like niggers; dig the ground with your noses in the work.’ In later letters follow detailed instructions for sowing, sale of crops, the leasing of land, the hiring of extra labour. Only his

youngest son is allowed to be a little spoilt and to be set to look after the bulls instead of doing hard work behind the plough.

These letters, found only a few years ago, might have been written today.

The crops were the chief of the Nile's gifts. But there were others. There were apparently more pools than there are now; more reed in the canals and more land still left as marsh. Here waterfowl bred in large quantities and were one of the main sources of food supply. To some extent they were preserved to make sport for the well-to-do. This would be chiefly in lakes and waterways on private estates. The birds were hunted with throw-sticks from skiffs made of papyrus. A man would take his wife and children in the boat to act as beaters. While he stood up on the thwart for the quarry, they knelt or sat beside him and startled the birds by clapping their hands. Instead of a retriever he took a trained hunting cat which sprang at slain and wounded birds and brought them back to the boat. But such spare-time hunting would not have kept the tables of all Egypt supplied. The poulterers, whether as independent shopkeepers from the bazaar or tenants of some big man or official game-keepers of the King or gods, had to use wholesale methods. Of these the best was a claptrap, very similar to that used by poachers of small birds in the country in England.

Two oblong nets were placed in a clearing in some reeds side by side, but separated by the distance of their combined width, and kept taut with



SNARING BIRDS WITH A CLAP-NET

light sticks at each end. Ropes attached to one end were firmly fastened to a peg in the ground a little way off. Similar ties at the other end were knotted to a single rope held by four or five men concealed behind the reeds. The ground between the nets was first baited, and when the leader of the group of men watching from the cover of the reeds saw that there was a fair number of birds on the ground, he signalled to the rest to pull on the rope. The effect was to make the nets turn over on their edges and fall together on top of the birds. The men then ran out and crammed them alive into baskets. Sometimes another man was waiting close by to wring the neck of each bird as it was handed to him and to pluck it on the spot while it was still warm. More usually, however, the birds were kept alive till they were sold; for the Egyptian woman would do a week's shopping at a time, and then she preferred to buy her poultry alive and kill it just before the meal so that it would be fresh. If you look at the wooden models of women bringing home food from the markets, you will see from the way they are carrying them that the birds are alive. In Ancient Egypt they had no chickens till late times, and ducks or geese were the staple poultry. Today they have no ducks to speak of, but chickens are everywhere, and in most houses you will find a few in the kitchen (or just outside) waiting their turn for the pot since market-day.

Fish, with which the Nile teemed, was an equally important item of diet, and, similarly, was a matter of sport and business. The sportsman harpooned

his fish from his papyrus skiff. But the fishmonger's supplies were caught in a drag-net. This was weighted on one side and had pieces of wood for floats on the other. It was let down between two boats in mid-stream, and dragged, still between them, to shore. The men from each boat then took hold of ropes attached to the ends of the net and advanced along the bank towards each other, thus gradually confining the fish to a small space in the middle of the net and close under the bank. From this they were easily pulled out of water, strung on a piece of string or a pole, and taken away to be sold whole, or salted and dried for the close season.

It is extraordinarily interesting to see this distinction between the sportsman and the man who kills for market so clearly drawn four thousand years ago or more. It shows, too, how civilized Egypt was at this time. The sportsman is the direct descendant of the hunter whose main objective was food to keep him alive, and for whom the risks and excitement of the chase were secondary considerations. For the sportsman, on the other hand, this excitement is everything; for he knows he can rely on the shops for his food. The Egyptian sportsman was a member of a highly organized society.

CHAPTER III

PUBLIC LIFE: GOVERNMENT

It is true that life in Egypt was based on the products of land and river. But that does not mean that everybody was employed in farming, fowling, or fishing. We are talking of Egypt at the height of her greatness. She was a country with two thousand years of united government—with intervals of anarchy, it is true—behind her. She was a leader amongst certain nations which had been familiar with each other's arts and crafts and had exchanged commerce for many centuries. She had an Empire of her own and for the time being had added to her own resources the tribute of countries many miles distant from Egypt itself. She had, in fact, an important place in what was then a fairly new idea—international politics. Such a country needed a well-organized society to run it.

The first question is, Who ran this great state? We know the story of the development of the present-day Powers. In our own time we have seen kingships being swept away by the people and democracies established. But the idea of democracy had not yet been thought of, which is an

interesting fact in itself. Civilization, it seems, was still too young—in spite of its material luxuries and scientific developments—even to imagine the idea of a sane country governed by the people; though, of course, there were frequent bursts of popular revolution of a lawless nature against bad and tyrannical rule by kings. Still, some of the stages which led towards democracy and which are familiar to students of European history can be seen in the development of Egyptian kingship. There was a world of difference in the authority of Rameses III and the Pharaoh we call Menes, who founded the first ruling house of a united Egypt.

In the interval of about two thousand years which separates these two potentates, the progress of the people in their struggle for reasonable freedom was a great deal slower than anything we are used to in modern history. But it was continuous. In those first days Pharaoh was thought to join the gods after he died, but was content to be human while on earth. The natural ability which had enabled him to take power was sufficient to keep it for him. But in imperial Egypt the King for his greater safety claimed divinity with his throne. That is an indication of the change that had taken place.

There are few documents to tell us about those earliest rulers, but enough to show that they were all-powerful in the land, with the lives of all their subjects in their hands. For their glorification hundreds of the peasants of Egypt lived and died as slaves or little better. Equally, any man who rose to

wealth or greatness owed these things to the recognition of Pharaoh. Yet no single man, by himself, can manage the detail of the government, however primitive, of a country the size of Egypt. And so gradually the kings put more and more responsibility on to the shoulders of their friends. But with responsibility went power; until the time came when these friends, greatly increased in number, and with powers entrusted to them grown beyond the King's personal supervision or control, felt the desire for greater independence and knew that they were in a position to demand it. There is some sort of resemblance here to the growth of the power of the Barons in England and the gradual cutting down of the King's prerogatives.

Unfortunately for Egypt this process went too far. The nobles reduced the kings to a position in which they could not properly govern and made matters worse by quarrelling among themselves. We have heard that story before—in the time of Stephen, King of England. Foreign invasion turned weak rule into anarchy; and the peasants, after centuries of oppression, were not slow to take a hand in the disorder. Eventually one noble house proved stronger than the rest, and successive rulers gradually fought their way back to kingship over the whole of Egypt. It was necessary that the power of the new line should be autocratic, as that of the first rulers had been. But the new Pharaohs had learnt their lesson, and the basis of their rule was different.

Briefly, the Pharaoh recognized the need to hand

over certain spheres of government to the nobles; but at the same time he devised checks to their power, so that they could not become a danger to the throne and so to the state. Thus, although he frequently allowed a son to succeed to the office of his father, this was an act of favour on the part of the King, and it was made clear that there was no right of hereditary succession. But the more important act of statesmanship was to give some degree of powers to the people by encouraging local courts in the towns, which were outside the control of the nobles. In this way the condition of the people was definitely improved, and at the same time Pharaoh's hand was strengthened by this attempt at a balance of power between the two main parties in the state. Even so, it needed a strong character to maintain peaceful government. After two centuries of a united Egypt with growing imperial possessions, the line of kings weakened and the country returned to anarchy and foreign domination for a hundred years or more.

Once more a native family managed to assert itself. Under the leadership of the rulers of Thebes the country was united against the invader, and after some years of struggle he was driven out. The third and greatest period of Egyptian national power was a much more complicated business than the two that had gone before. In the first place, in their eagerness to drive the foreigner right out of the country, the Egyptians had followed him into his own lands of Palestine and Syria. This gave them a taste for imperial expansion outside Egypt

of a kind which they had hardly dreamt of before. In the past it had been enough to establish trading colonies along the Palestinian and Syrian coast, and to control the Nile as a commercial route for several hundred miles into the Sudan by means of forts. But in the New Empire, Nubia—that is the country from Assuan to Khartum—became a definite Egyptian province, governed by a viceroy, and the main outside source of wealth to Egypt because of its gold. Palestine, too, and Syria as far as the Euphrates (and for a short time beyond it), became part of an Egyptian Empire, just as Egypt in later times was to become part of the Roman Empire. It was governed by Egyptian officials resident in its chief cities, and paid annual tribute for the privilege.

It is obvious that such an expansion required a similar widening of the system of government. There was no longer any question of the King ruling single-handed even with a large body of loyal nobles and local courts of elders in the towns. Nothing short of a widespread Civil Service could suffice to keep the whole organization running smoothly. This body of scribes is so important in this period that even the peasant seems to be pushed into the background. Another class of the population to be increased in numbers and importance during the two or three centuries of the Empire's glory was, naturally, the military. During long periods annual expeditions into the foreign lands under their rule were made by the Pharaohs; and thus what had been a comparatively scratch



EGYPTIAN TYPES

A young man of wealth.

A priest.

A king in regalia.

force, used in the Old and Middle Kingdoms as much for quarrying stone as for fighting, developed under the new regime into something like a permanent army. Finally, there was a very large class of men whom we have not yet mentioned, but who had from age to age been growing more and more powerful in the state. These were the priests. In the earliest times, they, like the nobles, had been under the control of the King in his capacity of chief priest of all the gods. Indeed his position had developed from that of sole priest and leader of his tribe in prehistoric times. But with the increase in his duties, Pharaoh had been compelled to farm out, as it were, his privileges as priest to subordinates; and gradually there had arisen in all the cities of the land large temples endowed with estates and a service of priests for their upkeep. The political importance of the priesthood rapidly increased. Although at times rivalry among themselves, particularly between the servants of the two or three most ancient and generally worshipped gods of the country, led to one party supporting the King against the other, on the whole we can trace a steady growth of opposition, and, in the long fight against royal authority, the priests may be counted as on the side of the nobles, many of whom held important priesthoods.

By the time of which we speak, the priesthood and the needs of the temple estates had become by far the strongest form of opposition to Pharaoh within the realm. It was now necessary for him to insist more literally on his own divinity and close

attachment to the gods, above all to Amen-Re, the king of the gods. But he also had to bribe the priesthood with the highest offices of state, with the greater part of the plunder from conquered peoples, and with the tribute of those more remote nations who still thought it wise to seek Egyptian friendship through gifts. The relation between Pharaoh and the priests was not unlike the long fight between the Pope and the Emperor in Central Europe, or (on a much smaller scale) the quarrel between Henry II and Becket. Only the struggle was more balanced and was very rarely allowed to come to an open war. In the end, however, not long after the time with which we are dealing, the clergy won and the High Priest of Amen-Re became Pharaoh.

This much history was necessary to show as briefly as possible the kind of government and condition of the state of Egypt in the golden age of the New Empire. For this must be the background for any picture of the public life of the nation. Now we can start with the King and work downwards. It must be remembered that what follows is a generalization covering a long period, and that if the details of any part of the description are applied to particular persons in history they will require modification in one direction or another. Moreover the kings were human and by no means always suited to the tremendous responsibility to which they were called. In these pages I am writing of the more successful and therefore better known ones.

Pharaoh, then, at this time, was no longer the

unquestioned despot that his ancestors had been at the beginning of Egyptian history; but in the eyes and speech of his subjects he was a god and all-powerful. Treason was an easy offence and death was the certain penalty unless the King chose to be lenient. So far as his personal surroundings were concerned, his wish was law. Every material luxury known to his age was at his hand. He could indulge his taste for building, and at the same time leave lasting marks of his own greatness, so long as there was money in the realm, and provided that the bulk of the monuments he erected were in the form of temples or for their adornment. Money consisted of tribute in kind, chief of which were gold and copper, and of slave labour, these being obtained as the result of continual conquests. For his recreation he could demand the best sport in three countries. He could marry whom he wished. He was surrounded with servants, and in all his dealings with his subjects, of whatever rank, was treated as a god.

But he had his obligations in return for all this, as well as limitations to his powers in many directions. He was expected—and in most cases doubtless was glad—to lead his armies in battle. Those annual campaigns were probably a relief from the duller business of peace. In peace-time he was required to hear the reports of his ministers and deliberate on them, and to adjudge lawsuits in the case of a final appeal. There were many civic and religious functions to perform, of the kind which fill the lives of modern kings and presidents. And

to a considerable extent he must have had to bow to the advice of these ministers—the Vizier, the Treasurer, and the High Priest of Amen. All the details of government were by this time beyond his control. They were in the hands of the Civil Service, which was divided into departments controlled by senior officials. These in turn were subordinate to the few chief ministers with whom the King dealt personally. He had therefore to rely on their reports for his knowledge of the different departments of state, as the King of England does today. Above all he had to play a tactful and at the same time strong part with the great priestly officials who controlled the clergy and temples throughout the land (although he himself was still nominally at the head of them all). For gradually they were absorbing the whole wealth of the nation.

It will help at this point to glance at the business and size of the priesthood. The Egyptians worshipped a great many gods, which in their beginnings had been the protective gods of the different districts and towns in prehistoric times before Egypt was united. Of these local gods several came to be worshipped throughout the whole land and to rank above the others. Chief of them all, from very early times, was Rē, the sun-god. But when, from the Middle Kingdom onwards, the kings of Egypt came from families which ruled in the neighbourhood of Thebes, the god of that city began to come to the head of the other gods. To make this agreeable to the priests of the others, however, Amen had to be fused with Rē—whom

everyone was inclined to acknowledge as head—into a sort of dual god, and eventually he became known by a single name, 'Amenresonter', which means 'Amen-Re-king-of-the-gods'. The worship of other gods continued, but Amenresonter was generally recognized as the most powerful god and the protector of the state and father of the King. His goodwill helped the Egyptian armies to victory, and it was to him that the plunder of the battle was devoted on the King's return. That is to say, it was handed over to his estates. It meant also that his particular city, Thebes, received the greatest part of the wealth which thus came into the country; and that is why Thebes was the greatest city in Egypt, even after it ceased to be the residential town of Pharaoh, and although Memphis was more favourably situated in almost every way.

This wealth was, I imagine, entirely in the control of the High Priest of Amen, and it had two main results. First, Pharaoh was allowed the honour of dedicating huge buildings to the god; and secondly, the property of the god, in the form of land and cattle and temple ornaments and treasure, was increased, and therefore the number of priests who served him. The service was not arduous, but it provided a living which varied according to the rank of the individual in the priesthood. Thus the tendency was for more and more of the land to be made over to the priests, and for more and more people to be able to gain their livelihood in the priesthood; while the senior men at the head of the organization became extremely

powerful individuals, controlling—in the name of the god—estates greater when added together than Pharaoh's own. These estates included not only all the agricultural land and slave labour necessary to support their owners from the high priest downwards, but also every kind of workshop, with their staffs, that could be required to make the furniture for the temples and to keep the temples themselves in order.

Thus all these workmen, free and slave, came into the huge body which was supported by the tribute paid to the god. Of these we shall hear more later. The occupations of priests proper were by no means confined to their temple services, which were simple and taken in turn. The schools of the country seem, however, all to have been attached to the temples, and learning always tended to be kept in the hands of the priests, as it was in Europe down to a few centuries ago. In the latter part of the New Kingdom the training of young scribes must have given whole-time occupation to a large body of the clergy. The men who had climbed to the top of the priesthood were in the position of ministers of the crown or heads of government departments, and were fully occupied with administration.

That brings us back to the court and the few great officials in daily touch with Pharaoh. These formed a sort of cabinet which really governed the land. Chief of them all was the Vizier, and at one point the power of this official became so great that the kings appointed two, one for the North and one

for the South, so that this tremendous authority should not all be in the hands of one man, and so that a useful rivalry should cause each to keep a check on the other. All business of state—except control of the treasury—went through this man's hands. Above all he was the Lord Chief Justice, and as such sat each day in his special court to hear appeal cases from the local courts. It was his business in the last resort to attend to foreign policy, treaties, and wars; to maintain the efficiency of the army; to control the irrigation system of the country; to adjust taxation. The only other official who had direct access to the King without first having to report to the Vizier was the Chief Treasurer, something like the equivalent of our Chancellor of the Exchequer. And the Vizier in his turn had to go to him if he wished to use the funds of the state.

Other great officials, though to some extent subject to these two, were the Overseer of Public Works and the court officials who controlled the King's private estates and household, and the important body of semi-private priests who were responsible for the services and upkeep of the temples of the dead kings. These temples formed some of the most important buildings in the country and occupied a great deal of the thoughts and wealth of each successive king. They were built in connection with their tombs and were intended for the performance of religious ceremonies for the soul of the King after he had died. Like the temples of the gods, they required large estates for their

maintenance; and a great deal of the royal fortune was invested in them. The same principle was put into practice, though on a smaller scale, by private people, who, if they could afford it, left arrangements for individual priests to carry on services in their tombs after they themselves were dead, and provided these priests with land for that purpose. The system was very similar to that of the Roman Catholic Church, by which a man left an endowment to pay for masses to be continuously said for him long after he was dead.



CHAPTER IV

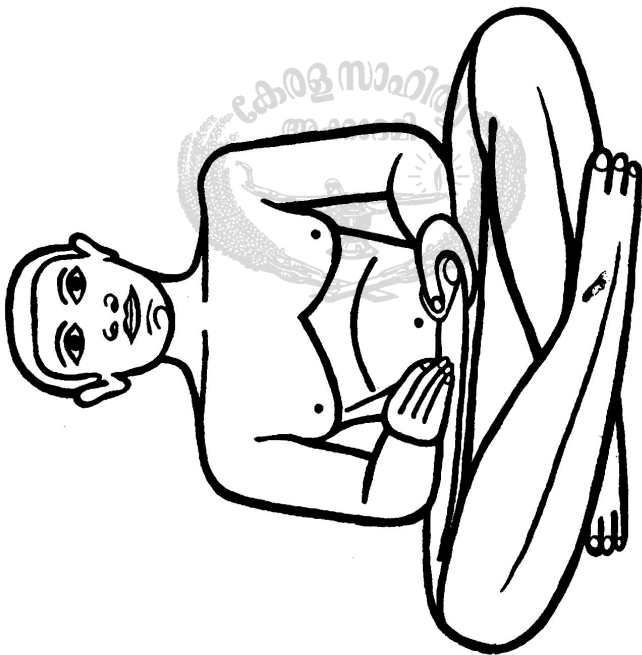
PUBLIC LIFE: PROFESSIONS AND TRADES

THE people we have described in the last chapter were the real governors of the country. But the mass of the population consisted of the hundreds of thousands of ordinary folk who worked under their orders and kept the whole thing running. Of these the most important were the 'scribes', who were all of a fairly uniform type, whether they worked for the priests and were responsible for temple accounts, or on the royal estates or in the offices of the great officials. But the largest class must have been this last. These officials were rather like the heads of modern government departments; they were thus in charge of huge permanent offices staffed entirely by scribes. These therefore really formed a Civil Service. You may tell such a man by his title, for instance 'scribe of the works', indicating that he was a clerk in the office of works. The commonest description of all is just 'royal scribe', which presumably meant no more than that the man was a clerk serving the Crown in one capacity or another—in other words, that he was a Civil Servant.

Some of the scribes no doubt went into private service as bailiffs or accountants or secretaries of wealthier men who required them to help with the management of their estates or in their public work.

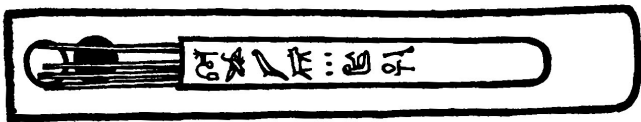
But all these people, whether in the service of the state or of private individuals, had a great deal in common, and seem to have regarded themselves as a great guild. And they were perfectly certain that their profession was superior to any other. They had reason for this attitude. In the first place their calling was the main, if not the only, means of reaching the high posts in the state. Pharaoh did occasionally pick out a man who had distinguished himself in battle and place him in a high position of authority; and no doubt more often he promoted his own friends at the court. But generally speaking he looked to the scribes for his advisers, simply because they were the only educated class and therefore the ablest.

Secondly, the scribes were a privileged class, as to some extent all Civil Servants are today. Their pay can hardly have been great, but it was probably as regular and assured as anyone's ever was in the Ancient East. They seem also to have escaped taxation. Socially, too, they regarded themselves (and were no doubt so regarded by others) as superior to the ordinary man in the street. Just as today in Egypt the *effendi*—the man who wears trousers and a *tarbush*—however humble his calling as a clerk in a post office or small railway station, is of higher standing than the *fellah* or country-



A SCRIBE WRITING ON A PAPYRUS ROLL

Right : A pen-case inscribed for Pamerihu.



man, who wears a skull-cap on his head and a garment like a nightshirt for outside clothes. The difference today is due to education, just as it was then. To sum up, the scribe's life was very much easier than that of the craftsman or the agriculturalist.

This superiority of the scribe's profession over any other was a favourite topic of their writings, and the main theme in the schools where the future scribes were taught their business. This was natural enough. Everyone knows that 'practising' of any kind is dull. The Egyptian student or schoolboy had little to learn besides writing, reading, and arithmetic, but all three in his day were subjects which required a great deal of learning by heart, and that meant practising the same thing over and over again. We do not know how long the period of schooling was, or how hard they were kept at it while it lasted. But we have some idea of the amount they had to get through, and it is not surprising that other professions and trades, which required less training, sometimes attracted the youth at school. So it is that his master was always holding out to him the prospect of his future importance and ease as a fully-fledged scribe; and on the other hand drawing a very black picture of everybody else's trade.

These accounts were no doubt exaggerated, but there must have been a good deal of truth in the comparison. For one thing it still holds good today, though less so than fifty years ago. The recent improvement is simply because there is a system

of compulsory education—based on the English secondary school system—which is gradually educating the whole people and thus levelling up classes and conditions. Nevertheless the descriptions of the life of the different trades, crafts, and occupations, from the schoolboys' text-books, is one of our chief sources of information on the subject and therefore of the utmost importance. It makes no difference whether the man works out-of-doors like the farmer, the fowler, the fisherman, the cord-maker, and brickmaker; or at a booth in the market like the barber; or at home like the cobbler; or in the workshop like the smith and the mason—all are depicted by the scribe as living a life of discomfort and hardship.

But what concerns us more at the moment is the organization of these people; whether they worked in groups or singly; in business of their own, or for firms or other private or public employers. Our information on these points is by no means always clear. But from other sources than the scribe's school-books we have a detailed picture of the relations of some of the different trades to the public. Thus in the tombs of important officials we are given records, chiefly in pictures on the walls, of the offices they held and the staffs they controlled and the work these did. It seems fairly safe to guess from these that the bulk of the artisans in the country were in the service of some big public or semi-public body, such as the state itself or the temples, or of big landowners who

in their capacity of local governors were public officials.

Such artisans would include workers of metal, leather, and chariots; lapidaries, jewellers, and glassmakers; carpenters and shipwrights; masons and quarrymen. The precious metals, gold and silver and bronze and copper, were almost certainly, in their unworked condition, a monopoly of the state. And so, it is certain, were the quarries. This last is natural enough, since quarries were part of the land, which was, technically, all owned by Pharaoh. A great deal of the labour in these trades was supplied by foreign captives. But it is not at all certain how far the Egyptians themselves were liable to slavery at this time. The implication, however, of the scribes' warnings to avoid these callings is that they were open to free men, and no doubt it is of these that they write.

A large number of men following country pursuits—farmers, fishermen, fowlers, etc.—were also employed on the big public estates. Some were certainly slaves; but others free employees, receiving perhaps their small holding and house, and, for the rest, payment in kind as their wages. But, as we have seen in Chapter II, by no means all the agriculturalists were in public employ. Nor indeed were some of the artisans. It is difficult to believe there were such things as independent goldsmiths working in the bazaars, or jewellers, or even perhaps masons. These must always have been connected with the estate of a temple or of a wealthy landowner if not with a public depart-

ment. But a number of ordinary everyday needs of the people must have been supplied by private enterprise.

Papyrus plants were plentiful, and while the writing-paper made from it was probably a monopoly of the state (judging from its high value), rope was made from it by the riverside and sandals in the bazaars. Sun-dried mud bricks could be made by anyone on the banks of the Nile. Fish was dried and sold in the market, and duck likewise. Leather was to be had by anyone who cared to tan his animals' hides. The women could make up the flax from their husbands' plots into clothes; though here too there was need of large factories employing female labour for royal and temple estates. The pastrycook could be found in the market, as well as in the palace kitchens and the priests' quarters. There was private work for carpenters and builders, although we more often hear of them in connection with government departments. Small stone vases were on every lady's dressing-table, and pottery dishes, vessels, and cooking utensils were used by the poorest in the land.

Yet even today the bulk of the native pottery is made in a comparatively small number of places, and is transported up and down the Nile for sale. In ancient times we know that most of the wine—at all events the best of it—came from the Delta, and was shipped up-stream to the southern cities. It is probably this internal trade which is referred to when we find mention of merchants in the scribes' accounts; and it seems unlikely that such

merchants were very wealthy or had a position of great importance. Foreign trade, as we know it to-day, was either in the hands of seafaring foreigners, or else was chiefly confined to the carrying of tribute from the rulers of foreign countries who were either subject to Egypt or thought it wise to keep on good terms with her by making gifts of their local products. More frequently such offerings were brought in person by ambassadors from the rulers in question. But there was still plenty of work for the shipping trade in importing goods, such as timber and copper, from the Syrian ports. These would have been either levied from the conquered peoples annually by the state, or actually worked abroad by Egyptian government officials. In return they would export such home produce as papyrus and linen and glazed ware from government workshops. But there does not appear to be any evidence for supposing that private individuals or companies had reached the point of merchanting their goods abroad. Probably the timber supply (from Syria) was controlled by the government, which would thus have the monopoly of the big ships, which alone were fit to go to sea.

This does not mean that there was no private exchange of commodities between Egypt and foreign countries. The overland route was used for caravans, as we know from many documents; and although we only hear of official dealings, there must have been some between individuals as well. But in the Ancient World for many centuries the exchange of goods between ordinary folk of different

countries seems to have been carried on by guilds of craftsmen who exported themselves rather than their wares. In other words, they split up into groups and moved in caravans from one country to another. There they settled for a varying length of time and followed their particular calling. Most of the small imported goods found in private possession in Egypt must be accounted for in this way. Sometimes these craftsmen settled for good in the foreign country to which they came. The Pharaohs encouraged foreign shipwrights from the Phoenician ports to settle in Egypt, and we find their families becoming important people in their adopted cities after a generation or two. Similarly there is a fragment of a vase found at Thebes which records the name of an Assyrian worker of lapis lazuli (or perhaps of the special blue glass which was made to imitate lapis lazuli).

One class remains to complete this survey of the population, namely the soldiery. The Egyptians were not by nature a warlike people, and in the earlier centuries of their history most of their fighting was in the nature of convoy work for traders, or for self-defence against invasion. But the long wars of liberation which led up to the foundation of the New Empire, and the introduction of new fighting methods—notably the horse-chariot—during that period, produced for a time an age of chivalry; and this was fostered by the imperial plans of the Pharaohs.

The result was that wars of some sort were to be had almost every year, and fighting became a life-

time's occupation. The army grew into a properly organized force, of which we even know the names of some of the Divisions. Part of the army must certainly have been conscripted. But it is equally certain from the inscriptions that it also offered a profession to a free man. It seems that he might join as a private in the infantry; or if he were well-to-do might go into the cavalry. In some cases he could take a commission at the start; probably any man could work his way up to officer's rank. Many of the soldiers served abroad for several seasons running. Some were appointed to posts in the countries where they fought, as commanders of military stations. But as a rule the actual fighting in any one year covered a fairly short period, and the soldiers who returned went to their homes till they were wanted again for active service. That would apply to the men who had joined the army voluntarily. Conscripts, little more perhaps than slaves, were employed on other government work, such as quarrying and building operations, during peacetime. There seems also to have been a third class of military between these two, whom we should call mercenaries, recruited from neighbouring countries, who were employed not only as soldiers but also as police.

Although ships were used for transport in war, and before the end of the period we speak of there were even battles at sea, there was really no such thing as a navy in the modern sense. The ships were merely the means of transporting land troops from Egypt to the base of operations and back.



A BARGE FOR FERRYING CATTLE ACROSS THE NILE

But it was the development of the ship as a fighting arm by other Mediterranean Powers that was one of the causes of the collapse of the Egyptian Empire.



CHAPTER V

ARCHITECTURE

WITH so much by way of introduction to the Ancient Egyptians themselves, we are ready to examine their achievements; what they did and made which is of value to us as works of art, or of interest to us as information, or even as practical lessons for our guidance. There is no doubt as to which of their works first attracts our attention. Egypt (even to people who know nothing about its history or its inhabitants) is before all things the home of the Pyramids. And if its climate is the first thing that makes it the most popular holiday resort in the world, the second is the array of architectural and sculptured monuments which decorate the country from one end to the other. Let us begin with these.

From the Egyptian point of view it was almost impossible to think of sculpture and architecture separately. For one thing, they did not care for bare surfaces, so that most of the walls of their buildings are covered with carved designs, generally called reliefs, which are a part of sculpture. Secondly, both sculpture and architecture were originally

used for religious purposes only, and so most of their statues had some sort of religious meaning and were really a part of the temples and tombs in which they were placed.

I have no intention of giving a list of the most important buildings in Egypt, or of describing the architectural details from a technical point of view. What I have to do is to show some reason for being interested at all in a style of building which is unlike anything we have ever used in this country. (As a matter of fact there are in London half a dozen buildings recently erected more or less in Egyptian style; but whether you like them or not, they can hardly be said to be accepted yet as a regular modern design.)

It is difficult for anyone visiting Egypt—or looking at good photographs—not to admire the temples, which are almost without exception the only important buildings that remain. Yet all but two or three are very incomplete. This impressiveness is due to the grand scale compared with the simplicity of the design. The elements of Egyptian buildings are few, massive in themselves, and almost without decoration except for the reliefs. These last, consisting of pictures and hieroglyphs, do not interfere with the straight lines of the design, or break up its masses. Although the arch was invented for use with bricks very early in the history of the country, it has no place in the architectural style of Egypt, which is essentially rectangular, in harmony with the vertical and horizontal lines of the cliffs which form the background

to every building.¹ That is one of the most satisfying things about Egyptian architecture: its suitability to its own surroundings. One could elaborate this theme for many pages, but these are things you can see for yourself. What is fascinating for us is to try to see how it arrived at what was nothing less than perfection in its own surroundings. The story of the beginning of anything is always interesting, but especially so when, as in the case of Egyptian architecture, it is something of which we are making use ourselves.

In the earliest days of human occupation of the Nile Valley, man lived on the edge of the desert, just where it rose out of reach of the inundation, and before it climbed steeply up the cliffs and rolled away into inhospitable mountains and sand. His first homes were no more than reed fences supported by two or three wooden posts, to shelter him from the north wind. A safer and more permanent dwelling-place was obtained by sinking a shallow oval or circular pit and lining the walls with reed and mud, strengthened with posts. These sometimes had light roofs of the same material. Gradually man learnt to construct complete huts above ground of this 'wattle-and-daub' style. The reeds were interlaced, and the corners of the hut given rigidity by posts constructed of bundles of reeds bound together. Palm branches were used too for the lattice-work of the walls, and from these two elements—the bundles of the corners and the

¹ I do not, however, believe that the style is *due to* the background. Cp. the argument which follows.

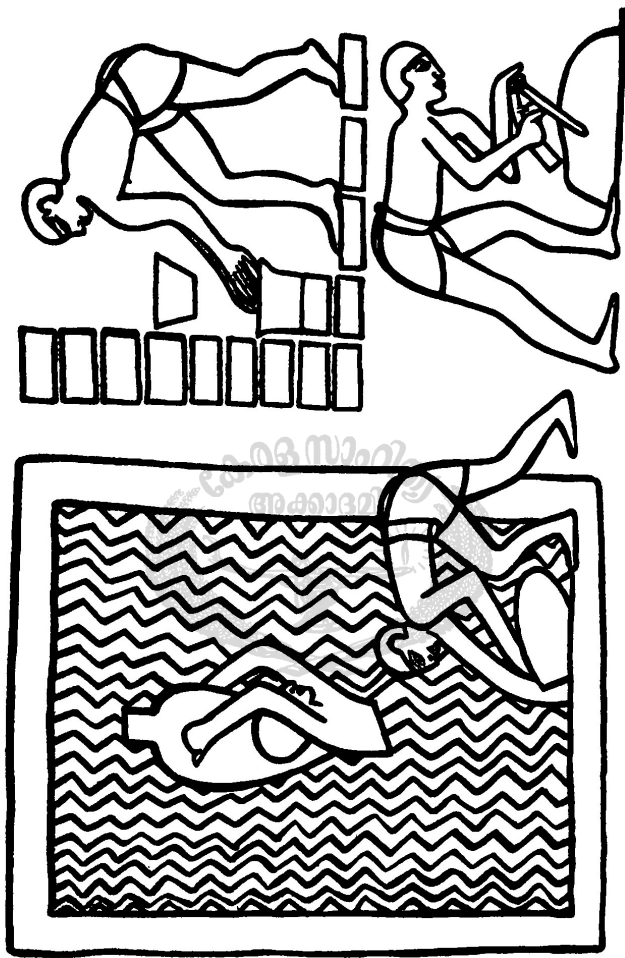
overhanging tips of the palm stems—came two of the most familiar characteristics of Egyptian architecture, which we call the *torus* moulding and *cavetto* cornice. You will find them in all the buildings which imitate Egyptian style at all.

The use of reed, palm stem, and mud has lasted in Egypt to the present day, but at the best it is only a light shelter, draughty and apt to give way before wind and rain, though the latter is rare. But by themselves they could hardly be dignified with the name of architecture. The first step towards the great things which were to follow came with the discovery of brick-making. It is not possible to say whether the Egyptians invented this craft for themselves or whether they learnt it from the Sumerians. The reasons for suspecting the latter people to have been responsible for the invention in both countries are two: first, bricks remained the staple building material (partly owing to the difficulty of obtaining stone) throughout the history of Mesopotamia, and from every point of view it is impossible to believe that that country did not discover the art of making them for itself; and secondly, which is more important, the method of brick construction was so exactly similar in both countries at about the same period, and yet was of a design so striking as to be unlikely to have occurred to two separate nations at once. There are objections, however, to both these reasons, as we shall see presently.

Meanwhile there is on the face of it every reason why the Egyptians should have stumbled on the

idea of the brick on their own. Every year they were accustomed to see the Nile go down, and to watch jealously for each new foot of mud bank thus left bare. For on this rich soil they immediately planted crops of one kind or another. But the river is not a mill-pond, nor in its retreat does it leave a smooth sloping surface. Instead the banks come out of the water in ridges, two or three feet wide and each standing several inches below the one above. Then the hot sun beating down on the mud rapidly dries it, so that it cracks to something like the depth of each ridge. In this way a chunk of hard mud will often break away of its own at the edge of a ridge. The Ancient Egyptians must often have made use of such chunks of dried mud for building and other purposes, and they can hardly have failed to see in the end that they could manufacture such building material themselves, and shape them more regularly than happened from the accidental cracking of the banks. Once they had realized this, they had in effect invented bricks. They would have found, however, that the pure mud of the river cracked too easily after it was dried, and by experiment learnt to mix a little sand with the mud to give strength to the brick. Finally, by mixing the two ingredients on a patch of ground where there was some chaff lying about, they would have stumbled on the fact that a little chopped straw or grass served as excellent binding material and made the brick tougher.

At all events, whether the Egyptians invented bricks for themselves or borrowed the idea from their Mesopotamian neighbours, they were already,



MAKING MUD BRICKS

before the beginning of historic times, making sundried mud bricks such as are commonly used to-day throughout the whole of the country. Naturally it took them some time to reach the full possibility of this new acquisition. Just as they had used wattle-and-daub first as a lining to a room hollowed in the ground, and later learnt to erect whole buildings of this material above ground; so they did not at first grasp the full value of the brick. Here again they used it first as a lining to the shallow graves they hollowed out of the desert. It began as flooring only, then lined the walls, then was used for walls to divide the grave into separate rooms, and finally to build a kind of solid roof over the tomb above ground. Bricks were probably used for graves—which were permanent homes for all time for the dead, as opposed to the temporary and short-lived dwellings of the living—before they were ever used for houses. While the use of brick was beginning to be appreciated, another material, wood, had developed a style of building which was to have a remarkable effect on Egyptian architecture.

Egypt grows a comparatively small number of trees and none of them is suitable for providing large planks of wood. Consequently timber on a large scale plays little part in Egyptian arts and crafts until a time when the people could afford to import it in bulk, and even then it was very expensive. Nevertheless they made as much use as possible of the local trees, of which the palm provided rough pillars from its trunk, and the acacia short stout boards. Neither was of much use for building

houses of any size. Nevertheless, remains of wooden planks have been found in excavations which, with the evidence of the brick and stone buildings that followed, show that the kings, and probably some of their courtiers too, owned portable wooden houses of a kind. They were single-room rectangular buildings, with posts at the four corners and at the doorway in the middle of one side, and the walls consisted of a series of planks placed vertically so that they overlapped slightly at the sides, where they were held together by cord passed through holes in the corners and the centre. Beams at top and bottom kept the whole thing rigid; and woven curtains suspended from the top beam, and kept tight by a rope fastening them to staples in the bottom beam, made them wind-proof and added decoration.

The importance of these wooden huts, of which hardly a trace remains today, is the influence they had on all building in Egypt afterwards. The panelled plan necessitated by this method of fastening the planks together became such a habit with the Egyptians, or appealed to their sense of design to such an extent, that they took it over for all their larger buildings in brick, and even later on occasion in stone. But the curious thing is that precisely the same panelled formation of brick walls is found in Babylonian architecture—which is the main reason for supposing that the Egyptians borrowed the art of brick-making from them—and it is possible that a similar development from wooden buildings took place in that country.

All that there was to know about bricks—except how to make arches of them, and that was not long in coming—was known by the beginning of the historic period, about 3000 B.C. From that time bricks were the basis of domestic architecture in Egypt. Three-storey houses and extensive bungalows were built of them, as well as private chapels and some of the smaller temples. They were used in the making of ramps for monumental stone buildings; and fortresses with walls 80 feet thick were constructed of them. The residential part of any Egyptian town must have been composed of brick throughout, with stone and wood as quite subsidiary factors. With one or two exceptions none of these remain, though almost every modern Egyptian town has its foundations set fast in the ruins of ancient houses. A number of forts, the bungalow town of Amarna, the ruins of two or three cities of the Roman period, and a few magazines attached to temples, are all that survive to tell us of the buildings of the living. And it is certainly not to see these, nor the hundreds of similar *mastaba*-tombs, that the traveller goes to Egypt. The most important stage in the development of her architecture, does not start, so far as we can tell, till the beginning of the historic period. There may have been buildings of stone long ago submerged under the mud of the Delta which date from the prehistoric period. If so, we are not likely ever to discover them. The earliest use of stone in building known to us is a granite floor in a king's grave of the First Dynasty.

A whole dynasty of kings passes, and then we have another tomb, that of Khasekhemui, the first king of the Third Dynasty, entirely lined with limestone. With the next step, later in the same dynasty, we are right in the middle of a flourishing art of building in stone. These remains, which have been only recently discovered, are not merely a magnificent addition to the architectural treasures of the country, but are of the utmost importance as a link in the development of architecture from the two isolated tombs we have mentioned and the fully developed art of the Pyramids at Gizah with their neighbouring temples. Until the excavation by the Egyptian Government of the buildings adjoining the well-known 'step-pyramid' of King Zoser, we had no idea of the processes by which the perfect masonry and accurate designing of the Great Pyramid had sprung from the elementary use of slabs of stone to line the graves of Den Semti and Khasekhemui. Now at least we see some of the steps.

It is interesting to notice that stone, like wattle-and-daub and brick before, began as a lining. That we have not lost much between that stage and the next revealed to us is shown by the fact that in Zoser's buildings the architects are still far from realizing the power of stone to stand alone. They are still inclined to lean it up against something, and to make it the facing to a solid brick basis, though the whole thing is now above ground. Above all they have not learnt to make their columns stand by themselves. There are two sorts

of columns at Saqqara; in the chapels of the princesses they are no more than pilasters, or half-columns in one piece with the walls they decorate. In the fine entrance colonnade to the whole temple area they are arranged in pairs on either side of the entrance-way, and supported a roof, but each pair is linked up with a screen wall which originally was as high as the column. So that really the roof rested on piers with column-like ends.

An even more striking proof of the comparatively early stage of stone-building at this period is the architect's use of ideas borrowed from building in other materials. All the styles we have already talked about are represented, often quite unsuitably, here in stone. Thus in the princesses' chapels the corners of the walls have an extra thickness carved in the imitation of reeds, as if for strengthening. In the cells of the Festival Hall heavy stone partition walls are built of blocks so carved that when they are put together the wall looks like a wooden fence supported by stakes of the same material. In the same building and elsewhere, entrances to the different cells, which were apparently never required to be closed, have heavy stone walls built to imitate wooden doors set permanently open. Finally mud brick is represented by a massive wall surrounding the whole enclosure. This is built of rough stone and rubble in the centre and cased with fine limestone from a quarry across the river. But the casing, instead of providing a gleaming smooth surface, which was just what stone, and stone alone, could do, and which

was exactly what the builders of the Great Pyramid a generation or two later did do, was carefully cut so that when placed in position it should present a recessed or panelled wall directly in imitation of the ordinary brick-built tomb or fort.

The unexpected nature of these buildings, the gracefulness of their slender but false columns, and the preservation of the fine limestone casing in large quantities (as opposed to its almost total disappearance from the Great Pyramid and its neighbours), at first led to a too generous estimate of the development of Egyptian architecture at this time. This has now been revised; and while admiring the beauty of what remains and the skill of the architects and masons who produced these buildings at this period, we can see from their dependence on the older building materials how new they were to their job, and how far they still had to go to establish the new material, stone, as an architectural medium on its own. Even in their craftsmanship they were still only beginners, compared with the masons of the Pyramid Age. For instance, the facing stones are roughly cut and only made to fit along their outer edges, where they show; they slope inwards towards the back and the cracks are filled in with chips.

But within a century all this is changed. The stone-mason came into his own. Only the two Pyramids of Sneferu are left as witness to the change that took place, and they are too near in time to the famous Pyramids of Gizah to help us in tracing the transitional stages. The builders of

the three great tombs of Cheops, Chephren, and Mycerinus had almost entirely forgotten their debt to the builders in brick and wood and wattle-and-daub who went before them. They had discovered the qualities and strength of their own material and made the most of them. They hewed out, levelled, and polished blocks of a size which it would not have occurred to their forerunners to use; they fitted them face to face with a precision which still wins our admiration today; and they left out all that imitation of the forms of the older methods of building, which they now recognized had no architectural part in the new type of building. These forms still survived as decoration in the smaller tombs of the nobles. But in the royal pyramids, which were their outstanding achievements, the masons trusted for success to the boldness of their design, the fullest use of the peculiar characteristics of their material, and their newly won craftsmanship in handling it.

As if they knew that they had mastered their craft and wished to prove it to the world, they built in the middle of this period the underground temple at the foot of the causeway leading to the second pyramid. Here they seem to have set themselves the most difficult task they could imagine: to cut out of the quarry at Assuan, transport from one end of the country to the other, and finally erect as columns within a confined space single shafts 16 ft. 6 ins. high and 4 ft. square of granite, one of the hardest stones in the land. Across these they laid beams, also of single pieces of granite. In this

amazingly simple construction, with no decoration beyond the polished surfaces of granite and alabaster, the Egyptians had arrived at the essentials underlying the much huger and more gorgeous temples which were to follow in the next two thousand years and more. The improvements which were to come were almost entirely confined to decoration. Within a century the square-cut column began to imitate the early architectural plant forms which had been the origin of the first supports in building—bundles of reeds and tree-trunks (palm). The old decoration borrowed from the earlier building materials was again used, but more sparingly than at Saqqara. Later the columns themselves were broken up from single pieces of stone into drums placed one on the other. The influence of brick-building reasserted itself in sloped walls. Above all, large surface areas tended to receive more and more elaborate decoration, not so much for their architectural value as from reasons of Church and State. For their first object was to tell a story—the importance of God or King or both. If we strip the little Roman temple of Philae, known as the kiosk, of its over-ornamented capitals, we are left with the beginnings of Egyptian architecture in the Old Kingdom.

CHAPTER VI

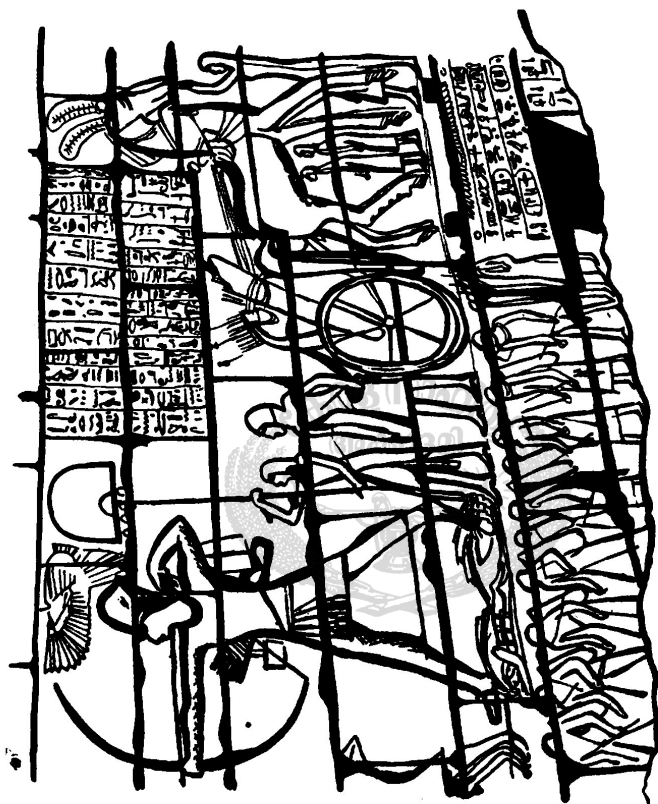
SCULPTURE AND PAINTING

THE carved decoration of temple walls, generally termed reliefs, appear today as an essential architectural feature of the buildings they adorn. In ancient times an equally important part of the scheme was the series of monumental statues which lined colonnades or guarded gateways, but which have now generally been removed. Yet both were there first to serve a religious or royal purpose, and only secondarily as decoration.

The reliefs were carved in the stone after it had been set up, and were usually painted, though few traces of colour remain today. They are of two main classes: in the first the Pharaoh is shown in some relation to the god of the temple, performing a religious ceremony such as he actually carried out within the temple walls, or receiving spiritual and physical benefits from the god in accordance with theological views of the day; in the second, Pharaoh records outstanding events or typical acts of his reign, to ensure his glory with future generations of men and at the same time to show his gratitude to the god, by whose help he has per-

formed the feats in question. The scenes themselves are accompanied by carved inscriptions in hieroglyphic writing which describe them and name the chief characters in the picture. The reliefs are therefore of the first importance as historical documents. From them we learn the details of daily ceremonial in the temple itself; of the coronation and other chief celebrations in a Pharaoh's reign; and of the great festivals and processions which were annual events and in which the whole people had some share, though many of them can never have been inside the sanctuaries whose mysteries are now to be seen by any visitor in Egypt. In the other class of relief we are shown the expeditions of the various kings in foreign lands; their wars in Syria and in the Sudan; and peaceful trading visits to Somaliland. The historical value of these reliefs is not always the same. The design of a Pharaoh who had successfully conquered several cities in Western Asia, in which his personal bravery was quite truthfully portrayed as the principal event of the campaign, might be borrowed in later years by a king who had never passed outside his own boundaries. On the other hand, Thothmes III, the greatest of the Egyptian Pharaohs, had a complete account of all his campaigns carved on the walls of a temple in his capital.

Although in all these reliefs the story, both of the picture and the hieroglyphs, was the first consideration, their decorative value was also of great importance to the architect. Some of the designs, often carried out on a huge scale, such as the picture



A PHARAOH IN BATTLE

Large-scale relief from a temple wall.

of Rameses III hunting wild bulls, are magnificent. In the balancing of the different parts of the picture effective use was made of the contrast between human and animal figures and the variety of signs in the hieroglyphic comments. In the finest work of this type the actual carving of every detail of the design is a superb completion by the best sculptors in the land, of drawings from the hands of masters in line. In the most beautiful of all temples (from the point of view of reliefs), at Abydos, the colours still witness to the skill of splendid artists as the final collaborators in the relief.

In other words, in spite of their practical purpose, the finest Egyptian reliefs are among the world's important works of art; and although the great majority of them, and the most important examples, are only to be seen in Egypt itself, in the places where they were set up from five thousand to two thousand years ago, yet the principal museums of Europe and America all have larger or smaller pieces worthy to be shown beside the sculpture of the Greeks, or the paintings of the sixteenth-century Italians, or the pottery figures of the early Chinese dynasties. On the other hand, most people would say off-hand that this work of the Egyptians was inferior as art to, say, the frieze of the Parthenon. This may in fact be so; but as a rule their reason for the judgment would be simply that, while consciously or unconsciously they had been trained from early years to understand, and therefore appreciate, classical art, they were quite unaccustomed to the artistic view of the

Egyptians. A little detailed study, a little explanation of one or two simple main principles, would make all the difference. This is still more the case with Egyptian painting; for here the design relied even more for its effect on line than did the sculptured relief, and it is in his drawing that the Egyptian has ideas so peculiarly his own. We will look at a few of the main ideas in a minute.

There is still one more point about the reliefs which seems to me to give them a special meaning for ourselves. This is their continuous reference (which increases as time goes on) to the world outside Egypt, so that when the whole series of these monuments is passed in review we are left with a keen sense of the importance of Egypt in world history and of a real connection with our own origins. In the earlier dynasties these reliefs are few but outstanding, such as the display by Sahurē, of the Fifth Dynasty, on his temple walls, of sea-going ships, with their tale of commerce with Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean ports generally; which in turn reminds us of the dependence of Egypt throughout her history on timber from the Lebanon mountains. But it is not till the New Kingdom, after 1600 B.C., that the foreign scenes become frequent on the reliefs. Then there are the trading expeditions to Punt already mentioned, and Asiatic wars, with their catalogues of men and places known to us from the Bible or from the records of other early peoples, the Babylonians, Assyrians, Hittites. There are the pictures of sea-fights with new-comers in the Mediterranean, who

were to displace the old civilization of Crete and give us the classical Greeks and their neighbours. Later still there are portraits of Pharaohs of whom Herodotus can speak familiarly, Psammetichus and Amasis, and the Egyptian artist on the other hand, having taught something of his skill to the earliest Greeks, in turn shows in his carvings the influence of his pupils' civilization on his own designs. And so we come to the last stages of these huge pictures in stone, when the driving power which had kept comparatively unchanged the same scheme of design and decoration for three thousand years was running dry, but the world-connections are more and more obvious in an Egypt which had become the province of foreign empires. Cleopatra's portrait ends the great series of Macedonian rulers represented by the most complete temples now standing in the land, and Roman emperors build, and carve their names on, the last great monuments of gods and men in the Pharaonic style.

I have said that private people also (if they were of sufficient importance) had stone reliefs carved in their tombs. But as this privilege became more widespread, and was not merely in the gift of the King, but was permitted to all who could afford it, a cheaper form of decoration had to be found. So whereas in the earliest time painting was always a part of sculpture, namely its finishing stage, by the time of the Empire in Egypt relief had given way almost entirely to painting in the private tomb. This was partly due to the new form of tomb then

fashionable, a corridor with transverse galleries, or chambers, cut into the living rock. The rock surface was not good enough to stand fine carving, and so it was prepared with plaster or, later, with mud, so as to give a fine face on which the artist could work as if at a huge canvas. The result is that within a few square miles on the west bank of the Nile at Luxor we have some three hundred odd tombs, mostly of the period between 1600 and 1200 B.C., which form to my mind the most fascinating of all material remains that the Egyptians have left behind.

The subject of these paintings has already been referred to. Here are collected, as in a photograph album, scenes of every kind from the daily life of the people of the time, as well as those depicting events which were part of the future life only. They are thus the main source of a great deal of our information as to the private and public life of the Ancient Egyptians described above. They are full of detail, and almost every kind of person who lived at the time finds himself on these walls somewhere. They, too, are sometimes accompanied by hieroglyphic texts which comment on the pictures or extend their information. Comparatively few writings of the time have come down to our day; but even if there were more of these, the paintings would tell us all sorts of little things which would never have got into the books. This was before the novel had been invented, but even in novels today we take a great deal for granted. Imagine trying to reconstruct a complete picture of ordinary life

in a modern European or American city even from novels! Should we have any complete and accurate idea of the clothes that we wore, or the food that we ate, or the different kinds of carriages we went about in? But if we were also allowed to use as information the Summer Exhibition of the Royal Academy, we should be able to fill up many of the gaps. The wall paintings in the tombs of the Egyptians of the New Kingdom are even more invaluable in view of the scarcity of their written accounts.

But the value of these paintings to us is by no means confined to the information they provide. They, like the reliefs, have an artistic merit not generally recognized because they are only to be seen, as a rule, by going to Egypt (which is not possible for everyone) and under unsatisfactory conditions, namely in darkened tombs. But of all the remains of Ancient Egypt which await the traveller to the country, I would say without any hesitation that the private tombs of Thebes most repay study and repeated visits. The paintbox of the Egyptians, which fifteen hundred years earlier had no more than half a dozen colours including black and white, could now produce two or three varieties each of reds, blues, greens, and yellows, and the painters had learnt to blend their pigments so as to give something of the effect of shading. Centuries of tradition in design and drawing had given the artists an ease and certainty of line, without depriving the best of them of freshness. Skill at preparing the surfaces of the walls for the paint-

ing, and at mixing their pigments, secured that the scenes would last, in many cases without any loss of colour, to our own time.

In London we are fortunate to possess the best collection of these paintings outside Egypt itself. They are in the British Museum and have recently been collected together in a special section to themselves, of the Third Egyptian Room. For harmony and variety of colour, composition and firmness of drawing, it would be difficult to find in any of the tombs a better example of Egyptian painting than the piece numbered 37977, which shows the owner of the tomb fowling in the marsh with his wife and daughter. But it is not only a masterpiece in its own field; it is a work of art that has its own place in the world's art. Many people, I am aware, would not accept this opinion on first seeing the painting, simply because it would seem so unlike the kind of painting they are used to. And it is no use pretending that these or any other paintings can be appreciated without some attempt to understand them first.

The most obvious difficulty to modern eyes, coming fresh to an Egyptian painting, is the complete absence of any perspective in the drawing. Figures which in real life would be at varying distances from the painter are drawn as if they were all at the same distance, so far as there is room for them. When there is no longer any room, a different 'register' or portion of the picture is cut off to receive another series of figures. Then, again, if the artist wished to represent the space or solidness of

three dimensions which we get by the ordinary rules of perspective, he would combine in one drawing two or more views of his subject which could not possibly be seen from one position. There is a splendid example of this method in the painting numbered 37983 on the wall to the left. Here is a picture of an Egyptian private garden of about 1400 B.C. The chief feature is an artificial lake with sloping banks of black mud on which small water-loving plants grow. The lake is surrounded by different kinds of fruit-trees. Lotus flowers (water-lilies) grow in the water, and duck and other waterfowl swim about with the fishes. And on the far side of the lake, at the right-hand corner, a woman picks fruit from one of the trees.

But if we stop to examine the picture in detail it is soon clear that there is no possible point of view from which so much detail could be visible at one time. For instance, some of the trees on the far side of the lake would be hidden behind those on the near side, wherever one stood—unless one was in the middle of the lake; and then one would have to keep turning round to see all four sides as they are drawn in the painting. Then again we are shown the actual oblong shape of the lake as if we were poised in a balloon above it; but the plants, birds, and fish in the water are drawn as if our eyes were on a level with the lake edge, or, in the case of the fish, as if they were swimming about in an aquarium and we were looking through its glass side. In other words, the artist has combined the important points of both plan and elevation (and a

third view as well to get the trees on the left of the lake), and built up an harmonious picture which cannot really correspond to what a person approaching the lake from any direction at all could possibly see. But if you understand what he has done, and the principles on which he works, you know exactly what he wants you to see. Furthermore, he is actually able to tell you by this built-up kind of painting a great deal more about the scene than could an artist who followed lines of painting with which we are more familiar. We might sum up by saying that the Egyptian painter aims not at showing you what he sees, but rather at presenting in a pleasing harmony of line and colour what you and he both know to be there. His individual objects and figures are therefore often more symbols than true representations; but the artistic value of his work is shown in the simplicity with which he has worked out these symbols, their completeness and ease with which they make themselves clear to us, and in his combination of these into a balanced composition.

Let us return to the temples which were the starting-point of this chapter. If the reliefs on their walls were the main decoration, the statues which furnished them were hardly less important. Few of these now remain in their original places, but enough are there to indicate the way in which they were ranged in front of the great pylons which formed the doorways to the temple, or flanking the colonnades of courtyards, or holding the place of honour in the sanctuary itself. These were the

statues of Pharaohs or gods. As a rule they were larger than life-size, cut from hard and softer stones alike, and all in one piece. Egyptian sculpture in the round covers all sizes from these colossal figures to statuettes of gods and kings and private persons not more than a foot high. And generally speaking it is the largest of these statues which claim the prize as works of art. In all the three great periods of Egyptian civilization, the Old, the Middle, and the New Kingdoms, there are outstanding examples in this class of sculpture. Moreover, though their common characteristics far outweigh the differences between them, there is little difficulty in deciding to which period any one of them belongs. Whatever right Egyptian art has to be ranked with the great art of the world is probably considered by most students to rest in the first place on these more famous sculptures.

Here, in spite of the conventional pose and somewhat 'robot'-like appearance of the human body, the appeal to our appreciation is direct. It does not need the same interpretation as the paintings and reliefs. There are obvious inaccuracies in the representation, and a tendency to neglect the limbs in comparison with the rest of the figure. This is at first disturbing and not altogether made up for by the amazingly good patches of modelling which sometimes accompany it. But the explanation is clear. What might seem a defect is really no more than the sculptor's intention to keep the extremities of the statue as simple as possible in order to concentrate the onlooker's attention on the face

and head. For in one way or another the face is always a portrait, and in it is expressed all that the statue is to stand for. There are, of course, examples in which the body and limbs are carved with barely less care and skill than the head: the famous squatting scribe in the Louvre is such a case; the whole poise of the figure expresses the patient but intelligent attentiveness which is driven home by the eager face. But the head is always the focus of the statue and it has received most care in carving. Consequently the masterpieces of the different periods come to be known and admired for the intensity of the facial expression. The untouchable majesty of the diorite statues of Chephren, builder of the second pyramid; the stern wisdom of the dictator-like heads of the great Twelfth-Dynasty Pharaohs; the definite claim to divinity of the Amen-Tutankhamen at Cairo;—these are perhaps little more than labels, but they serve to state the strongest appeal that the statues in question make to our admiration.

Yet once we begin to examine them in detail there is no end to our wonder at the craftsmanship involved, in the smaller as well as the larger sculpture. Nor must we forget that the art was not confined to stone, but that some of its masterpieces are executed in wood and even in fayence. Finally, in the short recovery of Egyptian civilization under the Twenty-fifth–Twenty-sixth Dynasties the sculptors achieved for the fourth time a measure of success which placed their best work in the front of the country's art—a superb example is the old

man's head (No. 37883) in the British Museum—and in doing so passed probably a great deal of their technical knowledge, and certainly something of their manner, to the emerging art of classical Greece.



CHAPTER VII

CRAFTSMANSHIP

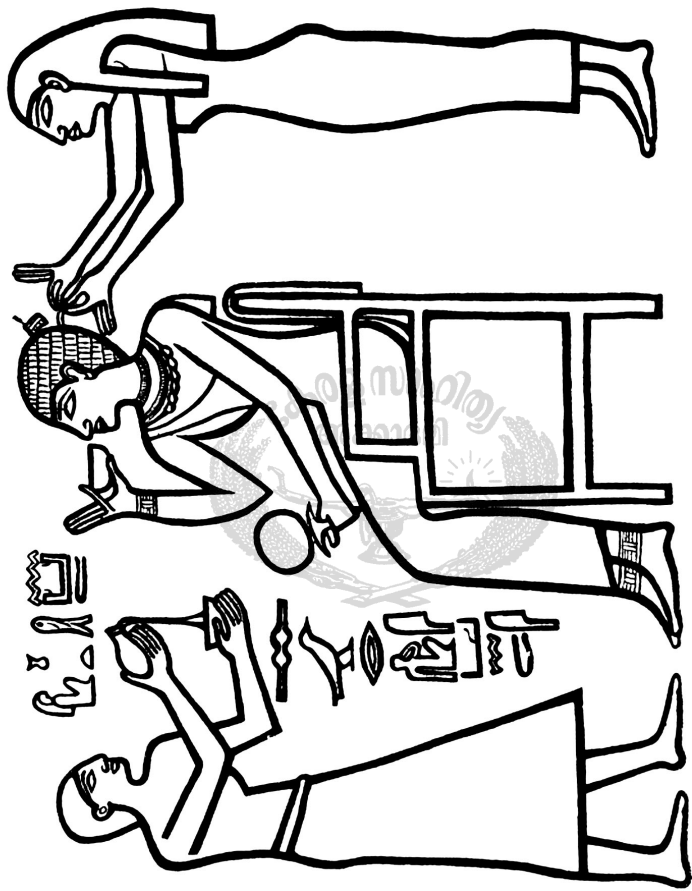
No other people of the Ancient World has left us so many and such varied material remains of its existence. Buildings and statues of stone and tomb-chambers carved out of living rock might have been expected to last through the ages, as they have done in Babylonia, in Greece, and in Rome. But only the dry climate and all-covering sand of Egypt could have saved for modern eyes such fragile and perishable materials as papyrus, fine linen, and even wreaths of flowers, as well as the innumerable small objects of gold and silver, ivory and semi-precious stone, wood and bone and glass and pottery, which are to be found in museums all over the world.

Here again the immediate historical value of all this material is obvious. How much more information about modern furniture and personal belongings is to be got out of the contents of a single house than out of a dozen novels which take you in and out of a hundred houses! So the actual objects retrieved from excavations help to complete in every direction our knowledge of Ancient Egypt, and to assist or amplify the information given by

the tomb-paintings. Those excavations are of two main kinds: the houses of the dead, tombs and graveyards; and dwellings of the living, private houses, royal palaces, and—since they are used by the living—temples. Both types of excavation, however, yield objects made for the living, for such objects were buried with the dead for their use in the next world. In addition there were objects made specially for the dead, but these have perhaps a narrower interest. And though, inevitably, numbers of these things are only fragments when brought to light again after two, three, or four thousand years' burial, yet there are few classes of objects not represented by many complete specimens.

Consider the variety. A complete selection of furniture, chairs, beds, and the stands which did duty for tables, from elaborate gilded wooden couches for kings, to humble, uncomfortable stone stools for the small townsman. The whole apparatus of household pots and pans—all of pottery; bowls black on the bottom from cooking, jars sunk in the floor for storing meat, pans with the ashes of the last charcoal fire before the house was deserted, wine-jars still with stopper and seal intact, the wine untasted but, alas, evaporated. The delicate outfit of a lady's toilet: marble or glazed vases for ointments and powder and paint; ear-rings and necklaces and bracelets for her person; the transparent linen gown with a laundry-mark still legible in black ink.

We pass from the intimacy of the home to every aspect of public life: the Pharaoh's official vest-



A PRINCESS'S TOILET

The servant pouring milk says, 'For thy spirit, Mistress! Drink what I give thee.'

ments—crown, royal jewels, and insignia—on the one hand, to the clerk's writing-case on the other; a bronze weight used in a public office, to a hoe from a peasant's field; from the cheap bronze figure of a god (one of the earliest examples of mass-production) offered by a widow in the local shrine, to the gold-bound state seal of a minister of the King. All have this in common—whether they are miniature works of art or worthless trifles in themselves—a personal feeling. They belonged to some man or woman, and apart from the information they give us about him or her, or about life in general at the time, they link those people to ourselves. They make them real for us in a way which nothing else can. This sense of continuity seems to me the most precious thing that history has to teach us.

One of the most interesting points in the study of these objects is that they have survived in such large quantities that we can follow the origin and development of the chief fabrics and manufactures from their beginning. For often these origins are the beginnings of crafts which have been continued to our own time, if not in a direct line from Egypt, at all events on similar lines. Comparatively few of the elementary and essential arts and crafts—the making of pottery, weaving, basket-work, metal-work, glass-work, etc.—are entirely, or even in part, our own invention; even where we have reason to suppose that something began in our own country the actual origins may be lost. So that to be able to trace similar origins elsewhere may be a help to us at home; while the fact that in Egypt

we have the earliest beginnings (that we can follow, thanks to the rich variety of objects preserved) of so many human occupations is in itself a fascination. There are of course other civilizations, especially that of Mesopotamia, which have a claim to be first with some inventions; but none can produce so much evidence of their use and growth.

It is not possible here to trace the developments of pottery, glass, copper-working, and the other essential industrial arts. Something of the kind has already been done for the development of building (Chapter V), and that is typical of the other crafts, and perhaps the most important of all the direct material contributions of the Ancient Egyptian to our time. But I must at random mention a few of the outstanding achievements of their craftsmen. For instance, before the historic period—not less than 5000 years ago—the Egyptian could shape and polish a vase of breccia—one of the hardest stones in the country—and hollow it out inside with only a small opening in the top. The hardest metal he had for the purpose was copper, and the bulk of the work was a very long process of grinding with emery. At this time he could also make the most beautiful flint knives the world has ever known; and he was already beginning to make glaze for small pendants and beads, which must have required a temperature of something like 800 degrees centigrade from his furnace. In turn the neat and complicated joinery of the Old Kingdom, and the refinement, skill, and exquisite design of the jewellers of the Middle Kingdom, make us

wonder at the craftsmanship of a people in whom the less material sides of civilization were no more advanced than we should expect at that time. With the New Kingdom Egypt had the fullest use in her history of material resources, and the opportunity was not wasted. The luxury of her life at that time is proverbial and is exemplified in the treasure from Tutankhamen's tomb. All over the country the workshops, in the charge of some of the finest craftsmen of all time—and all unknown—were turning out work which holds its own in our galleries today with the choice objects of all periods and countries. In ivory the little figure of Bes (No. 17072); in glass the unique fish-bottle from Amarna; in fayence the blue bowl, No. 4790; the silver and gold Amen Rē (No. 60006); the wooden figure of a girl carrying a chest, No. 32767; the golden, *cloisonné* hawk in flight, No. 57323; these are random examples to be found in the British Museum of the smaller masterpieces of Egyptian art.

CHAPTER VIII

KNOWLEDGE AND THOUGHT

HERODOTUS tells us that the Greeks thought the Egyptians the wisest of all people. Some people still hold this view today—they are the people who regard Egypt as essentially a land of mystery. But the results of over a hundred years of careful study of Egyptian remains lead to a different conclusion. It would, I think, be generally agreed that the Egyptians were the craftsmen—not quite the same as artists—*par excellence* of the Ancient World. (For the sake of completeness we ought to include the business of husbandry under the heading ‘Craftsmanship’.) That is their first claim to recognition. But the Greeks probably overrated their wisdom, especially on the religious and philosophical side. Egyptian religion was on the whole decidedly materialistic and strongly magical in flavour. It is true that for a brief space in the fourteenth century B.C. one Pharaoh tried to inspire his country with a somewhat higher faith, one which approached the religion of the Jews a few centuries later. Opinions vary as to how far he escaped the traditional materialism of his country, and how far his own beliefs

were really confined to one god instead of the untold numbers that were worshipped before and after his time. Even at the lowest view of his creed, this was a definite advance for the moment; but so also the highest view of it falls short of seeing in it an effective landmark in the history of religious development in the world.

But if the Egyptians cannot claim to have contributed much by way of religious observance and teaching, they did produce from time to time thinkers who gave their advice on the practice of good living to their contemporaries. Some half-dozen of these men's teaching has been preserved for us in documents mostly written on papyrus, which were in almost every case copied long after their authors actually lived. The contents of these books show a consistently higher moral tone as they proceed from the earliest to the latest. With the first, the famous 'Teaching' of Ptahhotep, there is little more than a series of extremely practical lessons on how to behave in public and private—almost a book of etiquette. The latest, though not without these useful tips, is largely composed of passages which so closely resemble the Proverbs of our Old Testament, that scholars are now agreed, either that the Egyptian book served as a pattern for the Hebrew, or that both have some other pattern in common. Other resemblances between Egyptian writings and the Bible are rather literary than due to real similarity of thought. On the whole Egypt was backward in its moral ideas, but it shared in the early centuries of the first millennium B.C. a

literary tradition with the whole of Western Asia. Yet if Egypt had nothing very much to give the world directly in the field of religion and morals, she has presented us with a quantity of evidence of great interest for the comparative study of those subjects.

Where the Greeks were probably quite right in regarding Egypt as a source of learning was on more scientific matters. The annual flooding of the country by the Nile had made it necessary to invent an accurate system of land-measurement very early, and a great deal of the geometry with which the Greeks themselves made such strides must have been based on the knowledge already in the hands of the Egyptians when the Greeks first came into contact with them. The two big mathematical works of the Egyptians which have come down to us show that by the middle of the second millennium they had already advanced a considerable way with problems in arithmetic and geometry and in what amounted to algebra; though their system of notation was very different from ours, and to us seems cumbersome.

Similarly, though most of their medical works which have survived are in the nature of old wives' tales—collections of spells and recipes with a great deal of unashamed magic and barely any scientific matter in them; yet the most important book of all on the subject is a surgical treatise, which is definitely scientific in manner and purpose—it is apparently a text-book for use in the medical schools—and proves that the surgeons of the time (not later

than the sixteenth century B.C.) had correctly diagnosed, and knew how to treat, a large number of cases both slight and serious. In short it now seems highly probable that the credit which has been so long given to the Greeks as the pioneers and developers of the art of healing should at any rate be shared with the Egyptians.

The other writings left by the Egyptians are in the main of literary interest. The peculiar nature of their writing, owing to which we have only a very rough idea of the pronunciation of Egyptian words, makes it almost impossible to try to judge of their style. It is possible to say that one writer uses short, common words; that another repeats himself; perhaps that a third has a poetical manner. It is certainly possible as a rule to distinguish prose from verse. But on the whole it is best to weigh the value to us of Egyptian writings in terms of their subject matter. The bulk of the actual documents that we possess are collections of religious texts known as the *Book of the Dead*. With the exception of a few hymns, and some passages which seem to correspond more or less with our funeral service, giving both instructions for the priest as well as the words he is to say, these texts are rather meaningless to us, and therefore valueless as literature. Putting these and technical works already referred to aside, we are still left with a variety of literary remains.

The principal among them are some dozen or so short stories, some with historical background, others more romantic. Among the early examples

the best is probably the 'Shipwrecked Sailor', which is no doubt one of the patterns on which 'Sindbad the Sailor' was later founded. From the New Kingdom far and away the best tale is that which tells of the travels and adventures of a king's messenger called Wenamun, who was sent by his master to Syria to bring back timber for a new barge for the state god Amen.

A very important book of a different kind has recently been discovered which deals in story form with one of the central themes of Egyptian mythology. It is the quarrel between the gods Horus and Seth, and in many ways is reminiscent of Homeric gods on Mount Olympus. Most of the papyri are schoolboys' copies of well-known texts—these stories almost all come down to us in that form—and a favourite kind of exercise was the model letter. Whole books of them have survived, and they show considerable variety in subject matter. There are simple enquiries after health; angry rebukes from master to pupil; ironical pictures of the fate of the lazy boy; and descriptions of the rewards that await the worker. There are long exercises in the use of foreign words, and of geographical and other technical terms. There are copies for business letters. Then there is a fairly large group of hymns to gods, and songs in praise of various kings. There are two fine collections of love-songs (which bear some resemblance to Solomon's Song of Songs); a file of state documents recording the trials of a number of men on the charge of robbing some of the royal tombs; the account of a private

lawsuit; a number of real letters of different periods; and, finally, another recent discovery, a dream-book. This is a text-book for interpreting dreams. A large number of possible dreams are stated, to which is added the comment 'good' or 'bad' as the case may be, and then the explanation stating what will happen in every instance.

It is not a vast literature; and a language which we can never hope to pronounce, even if we have time to learn to read it, is never likely to compete with books that are reissued in pocket editions. But it has a literary interest of its own, apart from its first importance as a source of information for the history and archaeology of Egypt.

For without the writing all the pots and pans in Egypt would not have got us very far.

So at the end we come to what is the beginning of the whole study of Ancient Egypt—the hieroglyphs. Before their decipherment it was not possible to read a single king's name, still less a whole papyrus. The history of the decipherment is in itself an exciting story but would take too long to tell here. I shall only try briefly to describe what the system of writing was.

The hieroglyphs are the innumerable signs in the forms of humans, animals, and objects which you find carved or drawn on almost any Egyptian monument. Of a total of about 2000 there were some 700 in common use, of which 24 stood for letters of the alphabet. The remainder represented sounds of more than one letter (but not more than three), or ideas conveyed by certain words or cer-



PRINCESS NEFRURĒ AND HER TUTOR

The tutor is Senenmut, Queen Hatshepsut's architect and chief minister of state. The part of the inscription visible names both the princess and her tutor.

tain sounds. None of these signs ordinarily represented vowels, which were not as a rule expressed in writing. Hence our difficulty in pronouncing the words, of which we have in most cases no key to the vowel-sounds. Thus the normal way to write a word containing three consonants would be to draw the sign which represented the sound of the three consonants, add to it one or more of the signs representing those individual consonants, and complete the word with a sign which suggested its general meaning. For example *nofret*¹ a 'girl' is written in which has the phonetic value $n+f+r$, the value f , the value r , and the value t (the feminine ending), while represents a seated woman and gives the general idea of the word, thus distinguishing it from other words spelt the same way.

The elaborately drawn signs which we call *Hieroglyphs* are more or less equivalent to our printed letters. In writing ordinary manuscript, abbreviated forms of these were used, to which we give the name *Hieratic*; and finally this was still further shortened in the script called *Demotic*. Most of the Egyptian literature has come down in hieratic.

The study of Egyptian writing is fascinating for its own sake, and of course essential for a proper knowledge of Ancient Egypt. But it may also have a special interest for us all today. When the

¹ The vowels are uncertain and are here put in to enable us to pronounce the word.

Egyptians, in the middle of the second millennium, sent expeditions to Sinai to mine the turquoise and malachite, these men came into contact with a less civilized, mining population living there, and presumably used their labour. The latter had no writing of their own, and seeing the Egyptian hieroglyphs on monuments which the officers put up to mark their visits, invented for themselves an alphabet based on the hieroglyphic signs, but having different values. That is, they could see what the sign represented—say, a house—but they made it stand for their word for house, not the Egyptian word; and not for the whole word, but for the first letter only. They seem to have been a Semitic-speaking people, and it is possible that they passed on this script to other Semitic-speaking peoples in Palestine and Syria; that, after undergoing certain modifications, the script came to be used by the early Hebrews and the Phoenicians, from whom the Greeks got their alphabet, who in turn gave us ours. Some of these steps are purely supposition, though reasonable as such. If they are correct, however, nobody will deny that our greatest debt to the Ancient Egyptians is our alphabet.

THE END

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